

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2014*

**Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Dinner in McLean, Virginia**

*March 4, 2014*

Thank you. Well, it is great to see a whole bunch of old friends and a few new ones, and I just want to thank Lynda and Chuck and the Robb family for opening this up—this beautiful home for us, and more importantly, for their extraordinary service to our country. They've been amazing public servants and obviously represent a legacy of public service for a very long time.

To Michael Bennet, thank you for—where'd Michael go? Thank you for taking on this thankless task. But I can tell you, Michael is as talented, smart, and effective a Senator as we have, and for him to also do what he's doing to help make sure that we succeed in the Senate is extraordinary. And then you've got two of the best Senators in the country in Tim Kaine, who I know had to take off, and Mark Warner. And I got a chance to know Mark when he was a Governor, and he had more control over his schedule than he does now. *[Laughter]* And I know he misses being Governor, but I also know that he applies the same dedication and intelligence and compassion to his current job as he did in his previous one. So you guys are lucky in Virginia.

I'm going to be very quick on the front end in terms of remarks because I want to spend most of my time answering questions and hearing from you. We obviously live in just a remarkable time. A lot of the focus today and over the last several weeks has been on international affairs, and I'll be happy to give you more details of what's happening in Ukraine.

The essence of it is, is we have a country that has been in a difficult situation for quite some time, that had a President that was closely associated with the Russians, who a large segment of the Ukrainian population did not feel was representing them well, although he had been democratically elected. You had a crisis inside of Ukraine as a consequence of his decision not to sign an agreement that would have oriented their economy a little more towards the West. That got out of control, and we got involved only to prevent initially from bloodshed occurring inside the country and succeeded in doing that. But ultimately, a deal that was brokered for a power-sharing arrangement in an election led to him fleeing, and we now have a situation in which the Russians, I think, are engaging in a fundamental breach of international law in sending troops into the country to try to force the hands of the Ukrainian people. We may be able to deescalate over the next several days and weeks, but it's a serious situation, and we're spending a lot of time on it.

In some ways, it reflects a broader trend around the world, which is, authoritarian regimes, ineffective regimes, corrupt regimes are, in this age of social media, having a much harder time clinging on to power. At the same time, in many of these societies, you don't have strong traditions of civil society and organization that allow orderly transfers of power, and that makes for an often chaotic situation. And part of what we have to navigate—not just this year or next year, but for years to come, not just in the Middle East, but around the world—is going to be our ability to help countries provide a voice for people who have previously been voiceless; to allow them to determine their own destiny, but to do it with some humility, recognizing that in each of these societies, we're not going to be able to impose order. We're going to have to work with these communities and the international community on the basis of some core principles.

And the central principle is that each individual is worth something, means something—their dreams, hopes, and aspirations matter—and that they should have a voice in the direction of their lives and they should be able to, if they work hard, aspire to some semblance of security and prosperity. And that's obviously a reflection of who we are as Americans. And one of my main jobs as President, ever since I came into office, is how well are we abiding by that ideal here in this country. Obviously, we've got a political system that, for all its flaws, is a well-developed democracy, and transfers of power occur in an orderly fashion, and there's competition of ideas between the parties. And having come out of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, we now have an economy that is growing, and we've created 8.5 million new jobs and manufacturing is coming back in a way that we have not seen since the 1990s.

And all that's good news, but part of the reason that I ran for office, part of the reason, I think, Mark and Michael and others ran for office, is because we strongly believe that it's not enough for the economy to grow in and of itself. It's also important that everybody is able to share in that growth, that if you work hard and you are responsible, that you can get ahead in this country, that it doesn't matter what you look like, where you come from, how you started off, you can succeed.

And everything we try to do from expanding early childhood education to making sure that work pays through our tax system in a way that helps middle class families, to investing in research and development that allows us to keep our innovative edge, to making college more affordable—all these things are designed to uphold the principle, A, we need to grow, but, B, we need to make sure that if you're willing to work hard and take responsibility, you are a part of that growth.

And the trend lines over the last several decades were that even when the economy was growing, folks at the very top did well and a whole bunch of folks were treading water. We're starting to reverse that, but we've got a lot more work to do. And if you look at the Senate's agenda not just this year, but over the last 4 years, what you've seen are Senators who are committed to raising the minimum wage; Senators who are committed to rebuilding our infrastructure and putting people back to work; Senators who are committed to basic research and science; Senators who are committed to making sure we've got a tax system that works for middle class families and folks who are willing to work hard to get into the middle class.

I know the Democrats in our Senate, and they're not a dogmatic bunch. They're interested in what works. They believe deeply in the environment, and they care deeply about climate change. But they also recognize that we need to grow. And so they're interested in how do we work together to both affirm our commitment to passing on to the next generation a planet that is as extraordinary as the one that we inherited from our parents and grandparents, but doing it in a way that's creating jobs and clean energy and doing it in a way that's allowing business to compete around the world.

They care deeply about making sure that we're doing something about folks who are trapped in poverty, but they also recognize that the paths we create are going to demand something from everybody. And we don't want handouts, we just want to give these folks hands up so that they can apply themselves and enjoy the dignity of work.

So the problem, of course, is that the party on the other side, although patriotic and oftentimes individually good people and folks who care about their families, have a different set of ideas. And those ideas have proven not to work. And what's also happened is, there's a segment of our loyal opposition that basically thinks that Government has no role to play

whatsoever in anything and have been spending most of their time trying to obstruct and grind the wheels of Government to a halt rather than figuring out how do we make things work better and more efficiently and provide the kinds of tools that people need in order to succeed.

So the choice in this should be pretty clear. And all I want to do is just emphasize the degree to which everything that you all care about—advancing every issue that is of deep concern to you—depends on us successfully maintaining Democratic control of the Senate. If you care about the environment, you better hope that folks like Mark and Michael are still in the majority. If you care about women getting equal pay for equal work or having control over their health care decisions or who is in the Supreme Court determining those laws, you better hope Democrats stay in the Senate. If you care about making sure that we're investing in early childhood education and continuing to reform our schools to make them serve every child, you better make sure that we still have Democrats in control of the Senate. And that's why this is so important to me.

So the good news is, we've got great candidates. Michael has done an extraordinary job recruiting. I think the DSCC is doing a very good job in fielding a wonderful team on the ground. And I'm going to spend a lot of time and a lot of energy out there working on behalf of Democratic candidates. But we're going to need you. We cannot do this alone.

And the last thing I'll say about Democrats, we are really good at Presidential elections these days, if I do say so myself. *[Laughter]* And as a corollary to that, we're good at Senate and House elections during Presidential years. It's something about midterms. I don't know what it is about us. We get a little sleepy; we get a little distracted. We don't turn out to vote. We don't fund campaigns as passionately. That has to change and has got to change right here, because too much is at stake for us to let this opportunity slip by.

So I hope that you come away from this dinner—and I thank you for everything that you're doing on behalf of our outstanding Democratic Senate candidates—but I hope you come away understanding the stakes and feeling the same passion I do about getting this done this year. This year is really, really important. The last time we had a midterm in a very difficult situation is we were right at the very trough of the recession, we paid a dear price for not paying enough attention to these midterm elections. We cannot repeat that same mistake this year. So thank you very much for everything you're doing.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:26 p.m. at the residence of former Sen. Charles S. Robb and his wife Lynda Johnson Robb. In his remarks, he referred to former President Viktor Yanukovich of Ukraine, who left the country after being removed from office in February by a vote in Parliament. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee :: McLean, VA, dinner.

*Locations:* McLean, VA.

*Names:* Bennet, Michael F.; Kaine, Timothy M.; Robb, Charles S.; Robb, Lynda Johnson; Warner, Mark R.; Yanukovich, Viktor.

*Subjects:* Democratic Party : Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Poverty :: Efforts to combat; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Elections : 2014 congressional elections; Environment : Climate change; Foreign policy, U.S. : Democratization; Russia : Relations with Ukraine; Ukraine : Democracy

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